(b) if so, the details of the efforts made so far in that direction?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M. R. JANARTHANAN): (a) and (b) The reforms in the insurance sector were widely debated by various forums from time to time with representatives of managements of public sector insurance companies and their trade unions; consumer interest groups, chambers of commerce and industry; academics etc. The scope of the reforms was further discussed by the Standing Committee on Finance with all concerned at the time of taking a view on the Insurance Regulatory Authority Bill, 1996. Since the matter has already been comprehensively considered by all concerned, the Finance Minister in his 1998-99 Budget speech announced that the insurance sector would be opened to competition from private Indian companies and the Insurance Regulatory Authority would be converted into a statutory body. Necessary legislation in the matter will be introduced shortly.

Deposits made by Public/Private Sector Banks in Punjab

1000. SARDAR GURCHARAN SINGH TOHRA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state the deposits made with various public/private sector banks in Punjab during the last three financial years and the credits/ advances made for the development in Punjab during the corresponding period?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M. R. JANARTHANAN): The aggregate deposits and gross bank credit of all Scheduled Commercial Banks including public/private sector banks and Regional Rural Banks as furnished by Reserve Bank of India, during the last three years in Punjab are given below:

(Rs. in crore)

As at the end of	Deposits	Credit
March 1996	20075.45	8406.90
March 1997	23042.76	9015.06
March 1998	27517.61	10628.23

Letter of Credit Fraud in SBI

1001. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) what are the names of the officials identified who have connived with the Madhumita Group of Industries and cheated the S.B.I. in the letter of credit fraud and what action has been taken against each;

(b) how much funds have been locked up in the scam; and

(c) whether similar fraud have taken place in other branches of SBI and if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M. R. JANARTHANAN): (a) Investigations conducted by State Bank of India (SBI) have resulted in identification of one Chief Manager, one Manager, two erstwhile Managers, one Accountant, one Field Officer, one Passing Officer and one System Administrator, all of Baghbazar branch who appear to have connived with the Group in commission of the fraud. All the above officials have been placed under suspension pending framing of charges against them. Central Bureau of Investigation have also registered a case in the matter.

(b) An amount of Rupees 112 crores (approx.) is involved in the fraud.

(c) Investigation has revealed that the Group had dealing with seven other

branches of SBI. The fraud relates to Baghbazar branch only.

Foreign Visits by Secretaries of various Ministries/Departments

1002. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH 'SURYA': Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of foreign visits made by the Secretaries (except foreign Secretary) of various Department and Ministries during the last two years;

(b) the amount of money spent on each of these visits;

(c) whether Government propose to undertakes any study of these visits; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI YASHWANT SINHA): (a) and (b) Relevant information is not centrally available, it is being collected from all the Ministries and Departments. This will be laid on the Table of the House as early as possible.

(c) and (d) Foreign visits of Secretaries to Government are approved only after careful scrutiny and assessment by a Screening Committee of Secretaries, presided over by the Cabinet Secretary. In approving such visits, the Committee takes into account the need and justification therefor, the benefits likely to accrue, the financial implications, etc. Approval of the concerned Minister is also a prerequisite. On return from the foreign visits, the officers are required to submit a report to the Minister and Cabinet Secretary to facilitate an evaluation of the outcome of these visits and their impact. The existing arrangements in this regard are considered to be adequate.

Simplification of Customs and Excise Operations

1003. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the action taken/proposed to be taken by Government to simplify the customs and excise operations to effect single window clearance;

(b) whether any specific guidelines being issued to deal genuine exporter/importer more promptly and more positively then ordinary offenders;

(c) if so, the details thereof, and action taken to train and motivate the field officers towards helping country's export earnings? and

(d) the action taken to strengthen the staff pattern, technical efficiency, system modernisation in the present day context?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (BANKING, REVENUE AND INSURANCE) (SHRI KADAMBUR M. R. JANARTHANAN): (a) So far as the Customs operations are concerned, Department's interaction with exporters/importers is at the point of import of goods/manufacture of goods and clearance of goods from the country. The import and manufacture take place without payment of duty under various export promotion schemes. The examination of the said goods are required to be made for the purpose of testing the composition of export goods and other conditions of the notifications. To reduce multiple checking, the officers of Central Excise have also been declared as officers of Customs under Section 4 of the Customs Act, 1962 so that they can also perform other functions.

Further, in this regard the following actions have also been taken in respect of Customs Work such as:—

(i) In view of the downturn in exports, field formations have been directed to avoid delay in payment of drawback and carry out periodical review of pendencies.

(ii) Provision of Rule 12(1)(a) of the Duties of Drawback Rules, 1995 further simplified to expedite speedy disposal of Drawback claims by delegating powers to the Commissioners of Customs for